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Beet Leaf Spot

Garden beets often have their leaves dotted with small spots which are usually grayish in color and are surrounded with a purplish or reddish border. When these spots are numerous they lessen the effective food manufacturing area of the leaf and thus reduce the value of the beet crop both in size and quality. Moreover the badly spotted leaves are likely to wither and drop off.

This leaf spot trouble is caused by a fungus (*Cercospora beticola*) which starting from a small infection point spreads outward in the leaf tissue killing the tissue as it proceeds and thus producing the spot. In such spots there are soon produced numbers of the spore bearing pustules of this fungus. These pustules are seen with difficulty by the naked eye but are easily observed under a lens. The thousands of spores filling each of these pustules are spread by wind and rain to other leaves where they start new spots. In this way the fungus may spread rapidly from a few original leaf spots until a great many beet leaves are badly spotted.

It is customary to take up the beets in fall and remove the tops, which are then left lying in the garden. If the leaf spot fungus is present in this refuse it will survive the winter in these old leaves and if beets are planted there again next season the fungus spores will start leaf spots again on the leaves of the young beets.

This leaf spot trouble may also affect plants nearly related to the beet like Swiss chard, but it is not found on other garden plants like tomatoes or celery or beans. Other fungi may cause leaf spots on these plants but not this one.

One can control beet leaf spot by spraying with Bordeaux mixture several times during the season at two week intervals beginning when the first leaves are formed; but as a rule beets are not valuable enough to justify this trouble and expense. The disease can be controlled well enough for all practical purposes by careful disposal of all leaves and tops in fall and by placing the beet plot in another part of the garden each year. If the old leaves are raked up cleanly and either burned, buried or carted away, and if crop rotation is practiced, the beet leaf spot is not likely to be troublesome.

